



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

### Fish and Wildlife

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Hugh Vickery 202-208-5634

#### BREEDING DUCK POPULATIONS REBOUND IN RESPONSE TO WET WEATHER, IMPROVED HABITAT CONDITIONS

After years of declines caused by drought and generally poor habitat conditions, the estimated breeding population of ducks rebounded sharply this year in response to widespread precipitation and improved wetland and nesting conditions, according to a survey conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Aerial surveys conducted in May revealed that overall breeding duck populations were up 24 percent to 32.5 million, compared with 26.3 million in 1993. This was 2 percent above the 1955-93 average.

"While this is just one year's results, we finally have some good news to cheer about," said Service Director Mollie Beattie. "At the same time, the crisis in our nation's wetlands is by no means over; we are still losing tens of thousands of acres of wetlands each year.

"The dramatic improvement in duck breeding populations should be a rallying point to redouble our efforts to conserve and restore the wetland habitat on which waterfowl and other wildlife depend."

Wet conditions were present throughout nearly all of the survey area, which covered 1.3 million square miles across the north-central United States, western and northern Canada, and Alaska. The estimated number of ponds in prairie Canada and the northcentral United States totaled 6 million, 47 percent greater than in 1993 and 32 percent above the long-term average.

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As a result, every duck species surveyed showed an increase compared with 1993. Mallard breeding populations rose 22 percent to 7 million (2 percent below the 1955-93 average). Big increases in southern Saskatchewan, Montana and the Dakotas offset a decline in northwestern Canada. In addition, Minnesota and Wisconsin reported record high numbers of mallards in 1994.

Gadwall were up 32 percent to 2.3 million (75 percent above the 1955-93 average), with increases in both southern Saskatchewan and the eastern Dakotas. Green-winged teal were up 24 percent to 2.1 million (27 percent above 1955-93 average) and blue-winged teal were up 45 percent to 4.6 million (12 percent above 1955-93 average), with increases in southern Saskatchewan, Montana and the Dakotas.

Meanwhile, scaup were up 11 percent to 4.5 million (18 percent below 1955-93 average), American wigeon 16 percent to 2.4 million (8 percent below 1955-93 average), northern shovelers 42 percent to 2.9 million (62 percent above 1955-93 average), northern pintails 45 percent to 3 million (33 percent below 1955-93 average), redheads 35 percent to 653,000 (13 percent above 1955-93 average), and canvasbacks 11 percent to 526,000 (2 percent below 1955-93 average).

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service administers or participates in a number of programs to manage, conserve, or restore waterfowl habitat. The North American Waterfowl Management Plan, an international partnership effort, has protected, restored or enhanced more than 2.2 million acres of wetland habitat since 1986.

The Service also has worked with landowners to protect, restore, or enhance more than 210,000 acres of wetlands and associated upland habitat on private lands.

Additionally, private lands enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program have provided millions of acres of upland habitat for waterfowl and many other bird species. This program has played a major role in restoring nesting cover, which was substantially reduced over the years due to agriculture.

"While nature played the biggest role in this year's good news, we shouldn't underestimate the role of all the people and organizations that have contributed to habitat preservation and restoration," Beattie said. "There are thousands upon thousands of acres of wetlands that would have disappeared had it not been for their efforts."

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